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Arizona Highways Magazine's Impact on Tourism

Background

The purpose of this research was to help determine the effects that Arizona Highways Magazine (AHM) has on tourism in Arizona. It is often assumed that travel oriented publications such as AHM have substantial effects on people's decisions to travel to particular destinations. However, while the effect of tourism promotion efforts on travel decisions is becoming fairly well understood, the influence of more informal information sources such as magazines has not been investigated to any great extent. It seems obvious that a publication such as AHM has an impact on tourism, and some of the research that has been done in-state certainly suggests that this is the case, but the specific nature and extent of impact is unknown.

Methods

This project began with a comprehensive literature review and review of pertinent secondary data. The literature and data review discusses consumer use of information, the information search process, information sources used by travelers,

market differences with respect to information use, and data that have been collected regarding information use by visitors to Arizona.

The data collection phase involved three survey efforts, the results of which are presented in Section three of the full report. One survey was administered to a sample of 811 in-state AHM subscribers and was stratified by self-subscriptions (n=610) versus gift subscriptions (n=201). A second survey was administered to 1,200 out-of-state AHM subscribers, also stratified according to self (n=604) versus gift (n=596) subscriptions. As well, the specific number of subscribers surveyed corresponded to the proportion of in-state (40%) versus out of state (60%) subscribers. The final survey was administered to a general population of people who were prospective visitors to Arizona. The general population sample of 1,433 non-residents was drawn from the Arizona Office of Tourism's information inquiry list from fiscal year 2003 inquiries. The two samples allow us to determine the extent to which the magazine has influenced decisions to travel

to Arizona and whether AHM subscribers are more likely to become Arizona tourists than are others with an interest in the state.

A technique devised by Dillman (2000) was used for survey distribution. This technique employs a series of mailings to achieve maximum response rates. For a mail survey, an initial mailing that provides a questionnaire, a cover letter, and a postage-paid reply envelope is sent to the sample. This is followed by added mailings to non-respondents including a post card and a second survey packet to increase sample size. The final sample sizes and response rates for each of the surveys are presented in Table 1. Self-subscribers had higher response rates (59%) than did gift subscribers (42%). With respect to the general population group, mail survey respondents (41%) had much higher response rates than did web respondents (18%). The survey procedure is similar to the mail procedure with the use of e-mail letters rather than regular mail and a link to the web-survey provided.

Findings

Data in the report are reported separately for in-state (ISS) AHM subscribers, out-of-state AHM subscribers (OSS), and non-subscribers (NS). A total of all the groups combined is also presented. A few members of the general population group (4.5%) indicated they were AHM subscribers and have been coded as OSS for analysis. Note that the three sub-samples were tested to determine statistically significant differences among the groups. These tests included chi-square tests and analysis of variance tests, all of which are used to determine whether any differences among groups are meaningful.

Primary findings include the following:

- AHM subscribers are demographically similar to other people with an interest in Arizona as a travel destination with the exception of age: AHM subscribers are older.
- A very high percentage of AHM subscribers have taken trips in Arizona over the past five years, with many visiting multiple times. As well, many in state subscribers have taken day trips in the state in the same time period, again often multiple times.
- The most frequently mentioned constraint to travel among subscribers is health problems, in likelihood due to the high average age of subscribers.
- Out of state subscribers tend to decide to visit Arizona at least two months prior to their trips, but make their travel arrangements closer to the time of their trips.
- Most out of state subscribers stay for about a week when they visit, most often traveling with a spouse or partner. In state subscribers are much more likely than other groups to travel with friends.
- Almost half of out of state subscribers stay in a hotel/motel while on their trips in Arizona, but quite a high percentage stay in a private home (friend or relative).
- Over forty percent of out of state visitors fly in to the state, and nearly all visitors drive a private or rented vehicle at some point during their visit.

- Out of state subscribers are very likely to visit friends and family during the visit (about two-thirds), but they also drive to view scenery, engage in natural area activities as well as cultural heritage activities, and shop.
- Subscribers in general can be considered “product involved” when it comes to Arizona as a travel destination; they have very positive perceptions of the state as a destination and are very interested in learning more about it.
- Subscribers use *AHM* fairly extensively as a source of travel information. They report the magazine has substantially increased their interest in Arizona travel, and is helpful with respect to making travel plans. Subscribers feel the photographs in the magazine especially increase their interest in traveling in Arizona.
- About 35 percent of out of state subscribers who visited in the past five years indicated that *AHM* influence them to visit Arizona on their most recent trip. Another 11 percent indicated they stayed some extra time due to *AHM*.
- In addition to its influence on visitors’ decisions to select Arizona as a destination, the magazine especially influenced decisions related to specific destinations or attractions and choices regarding travel routes.
- Subscribers have spent an average of over \$136.4 million annually over the past five years, and \$34,663 million of those expenditures can be

directly attributed to *AHM* and its influence on the travel behavior of out of state subscribers. This amounts to a benefit/cost ratio of 3.1 to 1 at the very least.

Conclusions

Arizona Highways Magazine has a substantial impact on tourism to, and within, Arizona. A considerable percentage of both in state and out of state subscribers are influenced to travel in Arizona due directly to *AHM*. Another group of subscribers are influenced to increase the length of their trips based on magazine content. Tourists make a variety of choices based on what they see and read in the magazine, with the photographs being particularly influential on travel. *AHM* is also perceived as being very helpful with making travel decisions. The magazine is most often used to help select specific attractions or destinations, to select Arizona as a travel destination in general, and to determine travel routes.

In addition to use of the magazine in the short term to assist with travel decisions, most subscribers keep *AHM* to use at a later time for travel planning, and most share their magazines with others. Thus, the magazine continues to influence travel over time. As well, even non-subscribers are reasonably familiar with the magazine, with 52 percent of the non-subscribers reporting awareness of *AHM*. This is a high awareness level, even for a tourist population with an interest in Arizona as a destination. There is some likelihood that these individuals have seen the magazine, have been given copies of the magazine, have friends or family in Arizona who are subscribers, or were even subscribers themselves in the past.

AHM subscribers who travel in Arizona differ in a number of ways from

other travelers in the state. Some of the more noteworthy differences between OSS and NS include a substantially higher average number of visits for OSS than other travelers with an interest in Arizona; a longer length of stay when visiting among OSS; and a higher level of involvement with Arizona as a travel “product” among OSS. It must also be noted, however, that subscribers differ from non-subscribers in ways that tend to not be viewed as economically beneficial within the tourism industry: they do not spend more money on average than other travelers; are more likely to stay in a private homes than paid accommodations than other travelers (probably with friends or family); and are more likely to visit Arizona primarily to visit friends and family than to engage in other activities.

The extent to which AHM stimulates travel by state residents is also worthy of comment. Although the ideal is to have tourists visit from out of state, thereby bringing “new” money into Arizona, it is also important to keep residents’ money at home rather than having it spent it in other states or abroad. As well, many of Arizona’s

rural communities are dependent on visitors from the Phoenix and Tucson markets, and certainly AHM induces travel to these communities when they are featured in the magazine.

Nearly all travelers to Arizona, including AHM subscribers, drive a vehicle in the state whether their own, a rental, or one borrowed from a resident, or they ride in an acquaintance’s vehicle while visiting Arizona. Clearly, tourists are users of the state’s highways facilities. Arizona Highways Magazine subscribers constituted over 226,200 visitors to, and within the state over a five year period, most of whom took more that one trip. This resulted in well over 1.3 million person-trips during the five year period nearly all of which included use of state highways and roads. When asked whether they had any transportation needs that were not met, very few noted any inadequacies in highway facilities, however.

Arizona Highways Magazine results in a minimum of \$34,663,000 direct expenditures per year by travelers who do not reside in Arizona. This amounts to a benefit/cost ratio of 3.1 to 1 at the very least.

The full report: *Arizona Highways Magazine’s Impact on Tourism* by Kathleen L. Andereck, and Evelyn Ng, Tourism Consultants, 8134 W. Palmdale Avenue, Glendale, AZ 85303 (Arizona Department of Transportation, report number FHWA-AZ-05-568, published February 2005) is available from the Arizona Transportation Research Center, 206 S. 17 Ave., mail drop 075R, Phoenix, AZ 85007; phone 602-712-3138.